

Momentous Change

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The years 1948 and 1949 saw momentous changes. Financial support for the Alberta Forest Service (AFS) was at last becoming available after years of constrained visions and plans.

Unfortunately, Ted Blefgen, Director of Forestry, had to retire due to ill health. It was disappointing for him since his retirement coincided with a major – and positive - turning-point in government support for the AFS. However, Blefgen was able to follow and appreciate all the advances and improvements that ensued in the following years.

Blefgen was succeeded as director by Eric S. Huestis, a native Albertan who studied forestry at the University of British Columbia. He started in 1923 with the Dominion Forestry Branch (DFB) and worked on most of the forest reserves before moving to Edmonton as Assistant Director of Forestry in 1940. When the Game Branch was transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Lands and Mines in 1941, Huestis received the additional responsibilities of Fish and Game Commissioner (without an increase in salary!). His knowledge and experience along with his determination and firm resolve guided the major developments within the AFS for the next 14 years. He finished his career in the position of Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests in 1966.

Land Use Planning

One of the most far-sighted pieces of legislation was the Order in Council of January 29, 1948, defining the “Green Area” of Alberta. Requests for homesteads

had greatly increased after the war, a result of returning veterans as well as immigrants looking for new opportunities. Experience with unplanned homesteading had highlighted problems such as settlers failing on lands unsuitable for agriculture, land-clearing fires escaping into forests, game poaching, and

the cost of providing infrastructure such as roads, schools and utilities. Two of the strongest reasons for creating the Green Area were included in the preamble to the Order in Council:

“It is desirable to prevent settlement and indiscriminate squatting on these lands that are incapable of providing sufficient sustenance for a settler and his family. Many of these lands have a nucleus for



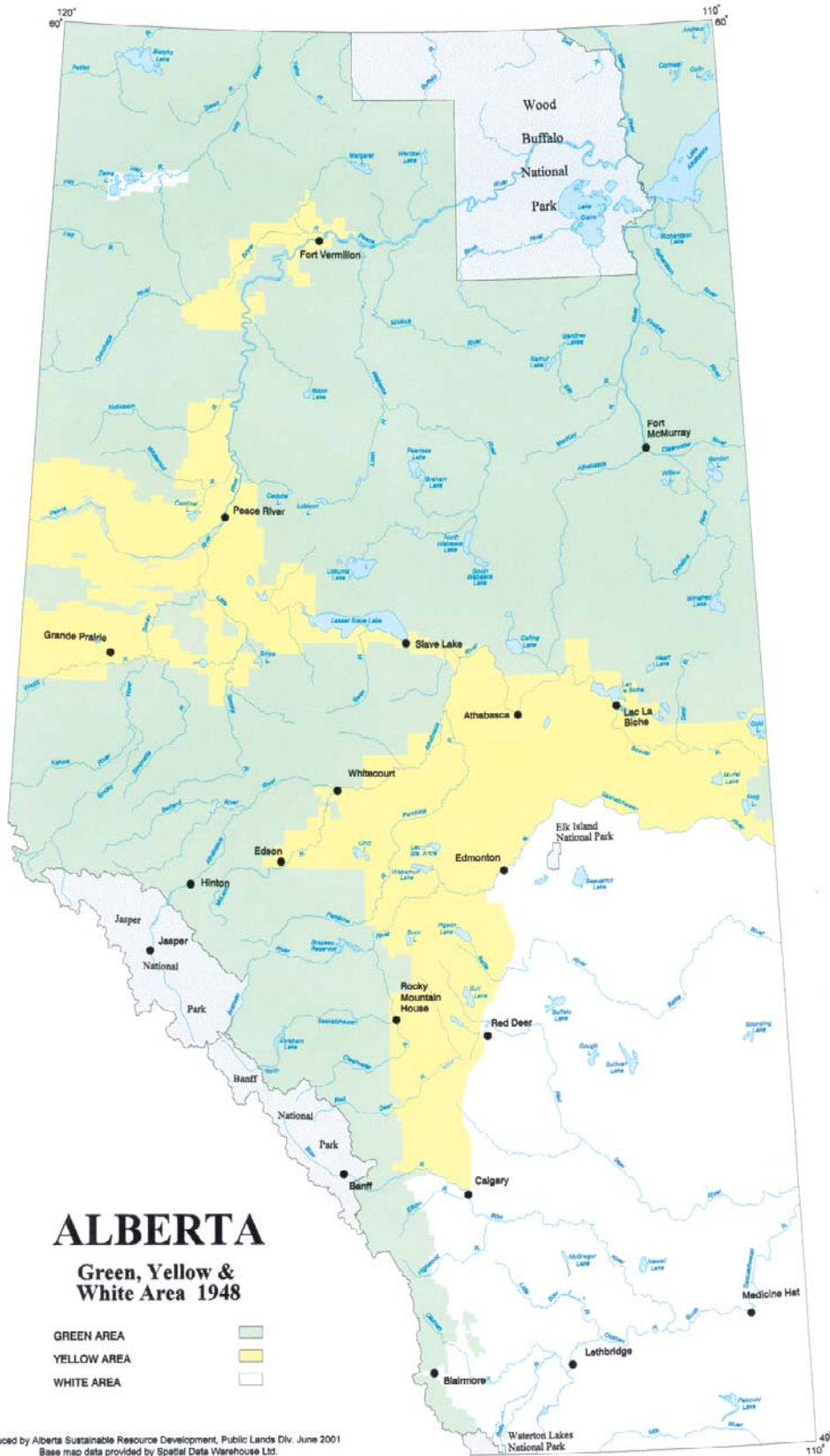
Eric Huestis
Provincial Archives of Alberta, PA2720-11



Alberta Forest Service Executive meeting November 22, 1946. Meeting held at the Edmonton Royal George Hotel

Back Row: (L to R) Ed Noble, Jack Janssen, Ted Keats, Not Identified, Not Identified, Eric Huestis, Tony Earnshaw, Jack Rogers, Herb Hall, Ted Hammer, Not Identified, Bill Woods. Middle Row: Bill Cronk, Fred Smith, Frank Neilson, Ted Blefgen, Not Identified, John Harvie, Harry Taylor, Jim Hutchison, Vic Mitchell. Front Row: Not Identified, Not Identified, Tony Urquhart, Donald Buck, Not Identified, Walter Ronahan, Not Identified, Scottie Lang, Not Identified

Provincial Archives of Alberta, BL1242



establishment of a valuable forest cover, which if given the essential protection will replenish to a very substantial degree in future years the timber cut to meet the requirements of the Second World War.”

The Green Area map showed the reserved forest in green, potential agricultural lands in yellow, and predominantly agriculturally-suited lands in white. The Green Area was intended to reserve forested lands from settlement. The Yellow Area was also reserved from settlement, at least until soil surveys were done and lands suitable for agriculture released in an orderly way. The AFS was thus able to focus its efforts on the Green Area, and to base its forest management planning on those lands most likely to remain forested. The AFS was also responsible for timber



Building the Forestry Trunk Road, Mist Creek, Bow River Forest, 1951
Alberta Government, AFHPC



Cat Creek portion of Forestry Trunk Road, Highwood District, Bow River Forest, 1950. Note snags from 1936 fires
Alberta Government, AFHPC

and prevention and suppression of fires on forested lands in the Yellow Area.

In 1949 the former Department of Lands and Mines was split, reflecting the greatly increased activity in oil and gas, as well as interest in public lands and forests. Minister Nathan Tanner and his Deputy John Harvie stayed on in charge of both new departments - Mines and Minerals, and Lands and Forests. Eric Huestis remained Director of Forestry, continuing to play a strong leadership role both within the AFS and in his relationship with the Minister and government. A second major development saw final agreements approved for the Eastern Rockies Forest Conservation Board (ERFCB) in 1948.

This was a joint federal-provincial agreement in which both governments recognized that the three southern forests - Crowsnest, Bow River and Clearwater - were important watershed areas and that both governments shared concern about Alberta’s financial ability to protect and manage them. The rationale for federal participation was based on the Saskatchewan River system that connected the three prairie provinces. It was estimated that 85 per cent of the flow in the South Saskatchewan River originated on the 15 per cent of the headwaters area lying in the Forest Reserves and National Parks. As a start, the federal government contributed \$6 million in capital for roads, ranger stations, fire control facilities and equipment.

Both governments shared the cost of operation for 14 years. Policy was set by a joint federal-provincial board, on which federal members were initially the majority. The major legacy of the ERFCB was the Forestry Trunk Road running north from Blairmore to Kananaskis and eventually to Nordegg, providing for fire, grazing and timber access and supporting tourism. Initial construction was sound and the road has served well for more than 50 years. The forestry trunk road now extends further north linking Hinton and Grande Prairie. Administrative control of the trunk road was returned to the AFS in 1959 after 12 years of operation under the ERFCB.